1

Historical Notes on Housing

In all villages, much time is spent, in addition to agricultural or fishing tasks, in housebuilding, either for one's self or for friends and neighbors. Housebuilding is the most time consuming of a man's tasks after his primary occupation. Repairs to or reconstruction of the poorer houses are continuous. The man with a good house and a tile roof has little to worry about. But he will often be found helping someone less fortunate.

The traditional houses of Naha and Shuri showed both Chinese and Japanese influences. The traditional house and compound of the rural village has been compared with the ancient Japanese house, and it bears some similarities with houses found among the Ainu.

It would seem from the observations and researches of earlier students that the house was always built above the ground without excavation, and sometimes on stilts. The supporting posts making up the rectangular house were either placed in holes or on stones on the ground. The supporting posts, the ridge poles, the cross beams were branches or trunks of trees trimmed and cut for length. Roofs of thatch had the apex of the roof covered by a saddle or arch shaped thatch made, like the rest of the roof, of grass. Smoke escaped either through an aperture in the ceiling or through a window, as it still does in many of the poorer houses. The houses were filled with smoke. The oldest rural houses apparently had only a dirt floor with scattered mats, though some had a raised floor.

The food storage sheds or small granaries were raised on stilts. Engravings of these have appeared both in Perry's writings and in Bayard Taylor's works. There is some question whether this granary (now disappeared) was indigenous or a borrowing. The purpose of the raised granary was probably to protect against dampness and to prevent infestation by rats and vermin. These granaries were open sided with no boarded up walls, and, in Okinawa, were circular.[1]

Animal pens or stalls were not attached to the house, but were always separate. In the courtyard, earthen rain water vessels were inbedded half way into the ground to catch the rain water. There were stalls for goats and pig pens, and the pig pens were used also as a toilet. This is no longer practiced to my knowledge, although the outhouse with its holes in the ground is found under the same roof as the pig pen. The entrance to the courtyard was opposite the front of the house. The protective stationary gate, the hinpun (in Okinawan), made of reeds or stones, stood at the entrance inside the court, as it does now, to shield the people of

1 For drawings of the granaries, see Satow, E. M. Notes on Loochoo. Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, 1 (1882), 1-8. The drawings follow the text. See also Simon, Beitrage zur Kenntnis der Riukiu-Inseln, as cited, 75-85.

the house from the glances of the curious. It has been suggested that the stationary gate at the entrance of the courtyard is of Chinese origin, that its purpose originally was to scare away spirits, and that its former presence in the tomb compound indicates that it was introduced along with the turtleback or horseshoe tomb from Fukien province in China.[2]

Captain Hall described Okinawan house exteriors and the surrounding buildings, including those of the common people. The house was "buried in foliage" and hidden from view. It was surrounded by a light fence of rods, about one foot apart with creepers on top. These rods were probably stalks of miscanthus grass, or of the dwarf bamboo. The site had a wicker gate, possibly meaning the hinpun made out of the dried grass stalks. One house which he described was divided into two compartments, eight feet square, with a small veranda at one end. The floors, made of bamboo, and about six feet above the ground, were covered with a straw mat. The walls, about five feet high, were wattled with split bamboo, and the house had a pointed thatched roof.

In the interior, there were shelves for bowls and cups, and in a loft or garret tools, nets, or baskets were stored. These installations now are often found in the kitchen. In the middle of one side of the house there was a fireplace, sunk below the level of the ground.

Outside, in the compound, a pigeon house, poultry yard and spinning wheels were observed. In another passage, Hall describes a cottage of "wattled rattans" with a light open bamboo roof with thatch and creepers, one wing of which was occupied by goats. The compound consisted of a stable, a pig sty, and a poultry house. There was also a mill. The granary was on posts about six feet above the ground with firewood piled below. There was an anvil with a forge of masonry but no bellows.[3]

The houses of the poor, said Fahs in his report to Commodore Perry, were made of bamboo and had no floors.[4] Accounts around the turn of the century say that houses and granaries were supported by corner posts of considerable height. Schwartz said these posts were about five feet high. The house walls of straw thatch were held in place by bamboo grass matting with a space two feet in width acting both as a door and a window, a matting curtain covering the aperture.[5]

[Text continues TOP of p. 73--Analyst]

2 Simon, as cited, 80. C. W. Bishop has suggested that the stone houses of the Ainus of Hokkaido point to contact with southern insular peoples. Also, the primitive Japanese hut which was illustrated resembled the one we have been describing for Okinawa. It had a thatched roof and a courtyard which was cut off from the outside view by the hinpun. The historical geography of early Japan. Geo. Review, 13 (1923), 40-63. Note especially Figures 5 and 6. (This article was reprinted in Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1925).

3 Captain Basil Hall, Voyage to Corea and the Great Loo Choo, as cited, 124, 141, 142-43.

4 Hawks, Perry's expedition to Japan, as cited, Vol. II, 50.

5 Henry B. Schwartz, In Togo's country. New York and Cincinnati, 1908, 148-49.

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342 magazines and pasted on the wall, and here he entertains visitors who come for conversation or study.

3

Types of Houses

342 In all the villages studied, the houses may be divided into three general categories: (1) the Japanese style house with the thatch or tile roof, (2) the smaller stone house with the Japanese type floor plan, and (3) various shacks resembling in some details the simple structure of the old Okinawan rural house.

[313] [439] [335] The sturdy Japanese type house is made of excellent hardwoods imported from Japan or brought from the forests of northern Okinawa. This house was often constructed without nails. It was put together by mortise and tenon joints, and also with a piece of wood, square on the edge and about three inches long which functions like a dowel. This is known as a kusabi. In modern houses, both of the simple and more complex types, nails are more commonly used.

[355] [411] [352] The eaves of this house are supported by strong poles, unfinished, usually from the Japanese redwood (sugi in Japanese, Cryptomeria japonica, D. Don) or the ihumaki (Podocarpus macrophyllus D. Don). The poles are placed on flat triangular stones for foundation support. The houses have plank floors. Both the tile and the thatch roof types (to be described later) have the same floor plan with the size of the rooms determined by the number of mats (tatami in Japanese) desired.

The half tile, half thatch roof is not uncommon, an indication either of a roof partially destroyed by the war which has been repaired by thatch, or a thatched roof gradually being replaced by tile. This is a slow process, as tile is costly. Basically, all of these houses have the same general plan, except for differences in roof materials.

[355] [415] [312] The older Japanese type houses with a tile roof and the newer ones being built on that model are provided with a drain pipe for rain water catchment. This pipe, running along the length and the width of the roof channels the water into a large tank on the ground, reducing the labor involved in carrying water from village ponds or central springs. Many of these rain water catchments disappeared when the old houses were destroyed in the war. Drain pipes cannot be attached to the thatch. In general, rain water is not now a plentiful source of supply in the villages, though buckets and tubs are frequently put out during a heavy downpour, and this water is used for drinking and cooking until it begins to spoil. It may supplement the water carried from a central village faucet, the well, or a pond.

The construction of the Japanese type house is complex. Basically, the design of the house is derived from the arrangement of three rooms,

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plus a sort of veranda, or inside hallway, an inner small porch paralleling it, and an outer porch--but in some cases there is only a stepping stone. The outer walls are usually of Japanese redwood. The houses are unpainted.

A narrow porch runs around the front and the side of the house opposite the kitchen. Between the porch and the room proper, there is a space for a paper sliding door (shōji in Japanese) and a connecting corridor (or veranda) known as an en (in Japanese). This corridor is about 35 sun, or almost a yard wide. The sliding doors covered with paper, so familiar in the houses of Japan, have all disappeared, though provision is made for them in the construction. Before the war, some houses had them; in others they were never installed. The rooms, therefore, are usually open, joined in front by the corridor. Partitions may cut off the whole room or be built up to face level. The outer porch (haji in Japanese) is in the courtyard in front or on a line with the poles which support the eaves. It may be off the ground about a foot; sometimes a cemented area or a stone walk two or three feet wide and on the ground acts as a substitute for this porch.

The pre-war house, of which a few remain in the southern villages, more in the north, normally has three rooms and a kitchen, with a back part for storage. The size of the house is determined by the number of mats which each room will have, and this Japanese convention produces uniformity and regularity in house construction. Actually only a small minority of houses have these mats. They were more common before the war. The pre-war ones have largely been destroyed or worn out, but during winter months or occasionally at parties or celebrations those remaining are taken out and used. A more modest mat, called a mushiro (in Japanese), made in Okinawa, often in the home or in the village, has taken the place of the tatami. It has the same function as a throw rug, but is rolled up when not in use. [352]

The names of the rooms also follow Japanese custom. The first room (ichibanza in Japanese) is the best. It contains the alcove, or recessed part, suitable for hanging a scroll (kakemono in Japanese), or for ornamental and religious objects. This is the room for guests; at parties or celebrations the men gather here, the women meeting in the second room. 342 353

The second room (nibanza in Japanese) has the Buddhist god shelf, universal in all houses except the very poor or makeshift ones. This shelf has the memorial tablets (ihai in Japanese) of the dead of the family. At parties and celebrations, the second room is the gathering place of the women. [769]

The third room (sanbanza) which adjoins the kitchen is a dining room. It has a small, low table for meals, perhaps a wall shelf. All of these rooms are also sleeping rooms (nema in Japanese). [352]

[Text Continues Top of P. 78--analyst]

TYPES OF HINPUN

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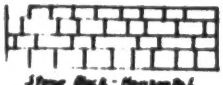
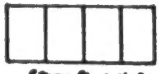


Stone Block - Horizontal
H'h 9", Thickness about 9"



Stone Block - Vertical
H'h 9", Thickness about 9"

Tile Lattice
Lattice 8 x 8'6"

Bamboo, Wood made of straw
Tatami, Bamboo
Mat size 6'x3'

ARRANGEMENT OF THE ROOMS

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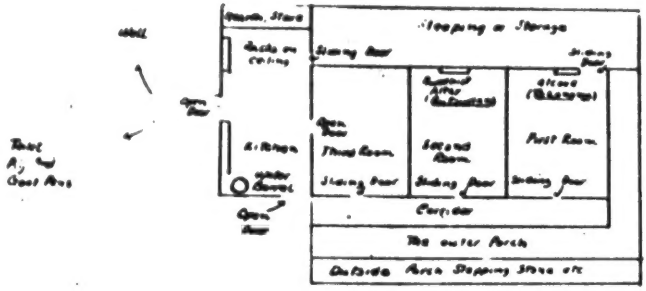
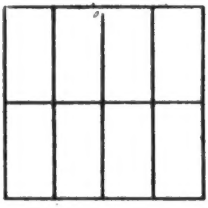


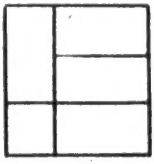
8 Mat Room



Size of mats
3' x 6'

4 1/2 Mat Room

[352]



358 children, whether in primary, junior, or senior high school, clean up the grounds and do repair and upkeep work. Young teachers, many [875] of whom are single, supervise the work, and often stay during the evening hours to plan the day's work or to study. Male teachers are night watchmen at the school, sleeping there in rotation.

346 The main problems of education are (1) adequate school buildings. Their condition reflects the haphazard tragedies of war. Schools vary in quality from place to place. The high school at Ginoza and the elementary school at Matsuda, for example, are excellent buildings; in other places, such as Gushichan village, the classroom buildings are little more than shanties with thatched roofs, and a siding of boards, [358] corrugated iron, or other materials at hand. At typhoon times, some of these are flattened, and it is normal to see school children helping [727] to clear the grounds and putting on new thatch. It is my impression generally that conditions are worse in southern Okinawa than in the northern area where war destruction was much less. The Civil Administration is well aware of these problems and the school construction program is, to all appearances, progressing. (2) Much the same situation and for the same reasons, exists with regard to school equipment. Rickety ●[352] chairs, old benches, bad blackboards contrast with the equipment of the new schools or of the old which escaped destruction.

875 (3) The post-war period has made a difference in the status of the school teacher (sensei). The destruction and disruption of the war, [727] scarcity, high prices and low salaries have made his position in most cases a precarious one. Before the war, the school teacher had prestige and money. Only the prestige remains. One high school principal esti- [465] mated that the post-war prices have increased 100 times, the teachers' [435] salaries about fifty times. Immediately before the war, the starting salary of a beginning teacher was Y45 a month. (The value of the pre-war Japanese yen was about US $0.27). A school principal received Y100 a month. Now the beginning salary for school teachers is about Y2200 and for principals Y5000. (The present value of the Okinawan yen is officially pegged at 120 to the dollar). Increases averaging about 30% went into effect in October 1951.

The school teacher has little or no money for clothing; his dress is the same nondescript combination of old civilian and army clothing that one sees on everyone else. This situation, serious in any country, is particularly so in a culture that has always regarded the teacher with such honor. The teaching profession is the source of many careers [555] in public office. Even in casual observation, one frequently finds that mayors, vice-mayors, former members of the Japanese civil service, started life as teachers.

The Okinawan teacher works hard and enthusiastically, but new attitudes are appearing which must be recognized. There is a desire to leave the profession, particularly noticeable in the male teachers under 30. Economic difficulties are reflected in frustration and discouragement. Okinawan school teachers, if the ones I knew are representative, have enthusiasm for ideas of democracy and freedom and for reforms that have

342 floor, resting his feet outside on the ground. An overhanging roof protects him from the rain. Larger houses have an entrance hall and a porch running along the front. Since these porches also have sliding door panels, few people bother to use the entrance except on formal visits.

The simple structures have a framework which is basically the same [336] as that of the more complex ones. Neither is constructed with nails but held together by mortise and tenon joints. Thick layers of thatch or a tile roof give adequate protection from rains. Thatch roofs need re- [356] placement every few years, but they keep the house cooler than the more permanent, more expensive clay or cement tile roofs. House walls are made of very thin, cheap wood which weathers fast and cracks, allowing winds to enter freely. Only the new houses have solid double walls. The floor in the simple buildings consists of planks which in many houses are not nailed down; during the winter months the cold penetrates through the wide slots between the boards. Better houses have ceilings and doors to separate the "first" and "second" room in the front of the house, as well as solid floors.

Smoke from the open fireplace in the kitchen rises into the roof and [151] seeps through the thatch. Poor eyesight, common among children, is believed by the villagers to result from smoke-filled houses and poor lighting. In the evening, dim light is provided by one or two kerosene lamps.

342 The ancestral shrine, a built-in shelf for the ancestral tablets, has
353 its place in the "second" room. This shrine is only found in the homes
769 of oldest sons. It is not treated with special reverence. Photographs of the deceased as well as of living relatives are kept there as well as personal belongings—a letter, money, a bottle of sake, or gifts. During [822] religious holidays of ancestral worship, red hibiscus flowers, the color for the dead, are placed on the shelf. Since the shelf is high from the floor, small children cannot get at it.

●352 The only furniture in all houses is a low table on which food and [516] drinks are served. Everybody sits on the floor, legs crossed and feet tucked under their thighs in the case of men or put behind to one side in the case of women. Very few houses in Taira have the thick, padded straw mats found in the homes of more well-to-do people in Okinawa. But every family has several thin mats of woven reed standing in one corner of the room; these are spread out for guests to sit on or for a member of the household who lies down during the day. Storage
353 shelves are used in simple houses, but in the better houses mattresses, comforters, and hard pillows are kept in a built-in closet space during [356] the day. On sunny days women air the bedding by spreading it over walls, fences, or in the grass.

2:Maretzki & Maretzki E-5 (1954-1955) 1963 AC7 Okinawa AC7
Taira

There are no uniform sleeping arrangements. The larger the family, 513
the more corners of the front rooms and rear room are occupied. Since the number of comforters is limited in most families, two or three members of the family share one. Father and mother do not always sleep together, and, even if they do, an infant may sleep between them. When there are several children, another child may sleep next to the father, so that in one row there may be mother, a baby, father, and an older child. One or two children usually sleep with the grandmother in another corner. In several families an older sister may sleep with younger brothers; in others, two elder brothers, or an older sister and an older brother, may sleep next to each other. Children do not usually sleep at other people's houses, but when they reach junior high school age, a girl may stay with a girl friend or a group of boys may sleep together at one house.

A simple desk and chair are kept in each house where children go to 352
school. These are put in one corner of the front room, except in large houses with a third room in front, which is reserved for schoolchildren of the house, who also sleep there. Around the study corner, books are 353
kept on a crate or shelf. Only the biggest houses have a niche in their "first" room. Paintings and scrolls, used to decorate alcoves before the war, have been lost, and few people have acquired replacements. Many families decorate rooms by pasting pictures from magazines and newspapers on the walls. Some have reproductions of the Japanese Crown Prince Akihito, others scenic pictures from Japan.

Only a few recent buildings have inner sliding doors with paper 342
screens. The paper is often left off during the hot season and put on 356
before New Year. If children or cats are around, the splendor does not last long, and even an adult's hand frequently punctures the screen in trying to open the door. Holes are left unrepaired for the remainder of the year.

The eating corner between kitchen and rear room is the place where 342
most families gather in the evening, especially during the winter. An 264
informal caller may join them there. If it is cold, a brazier is put in 354
the center, filled with pieces of charcoal on top of old ashes to provide heat for those sitting around it. These braziers vary in type: the poorest families use the bottom of an oil drum filled with ashes; others use pottery jars or small wooden boxes lined with metal.

Crockery used in most houses is of a simple type. If breakage oc- 415
curs, as it often does, a cup or bowl can be replaced for a few yen at the grocery store. Well-to-do families may have an extra set of teacups, which are used for guests. Several families also own lacquer ware, but it is not in daily use. Like cups and bowls, chopsticks are simple and [412]
inexpensive. They last a long time and are seldom lost. Children do

2:Maretzki & Maretzki E-5 (1954-1955) 1963 AC7 Okinawa AC7
Taira

cash income, earned by several adult members in joint work, or equal to about one half of a teacher's monthly salary. The girl brings a dowry consisting of furniture, household utensils, and other things, so, as one person said, the groom is repaid in one form or another. In former times the men had to pay a fine to the parents of the bride if she married out of the village (Suttles, personal communication; Tamura, 1927 translation:44).

Even under present conditions the wedding ceremony is colorful compared to most other private ceremonies. All guests attend in their best clothes and the bride wears a special kimono and a special wig hair dress. She is seated next to the groom, who wears Western-style clothes instead of the traditional silk kimono. The whole ceremony is presided over by the go-betweens. While preliminaries take place, the bride sits almost motionless. Her face expresses what Glacken describes as "undescribable gloom" (1955:218). This continues even through the climax of the event, the ceremonial exchange of wine which symbolizes the union of the participants. During this part of the ceremony the guests, who have been enjoying food and sake and talking amicably, give this moment a solemn meaning by their silence. Speeches by the go-between and other notables follow. The virtue of the bride and her family and of the groom are told and acknowledged by a thank-you address by the groom. Parents of the couple sit close to them but have no other function than to accept congratulations. The bride then goes around introducing herself to the guests.

Children are not present at this event. They line up outside the house and peek through openings to see the bride and watch the guests, who start dances as soon as good food and wine take effect. After the formal part of the wedding, the feast ends like any such event in the village—with great gaiety. The bride acts as hostess; she changes from her kimono and heavy hair dress into more suitable clothes and sees that the guests are well taken care of. The length of this feast depends, of course, on how much food and drink the family is able to provide. Finally, when all guests have left, the bride and groom retire to the bedroom which has been reserved for them, sometimes furnished with one or two pieces, a chest of drawers or a Western-style closet supplied by the bride's family. The bride also provides the comforter for the marriage bed. Friends of the groom may play a prank and replace the normal-sized comforter with a small one, "so that the marriage is consumated quicker," as they say.

Sexual relations between husband and wife are not discussed in public except in jocular references. In spite of the intimacy of household members in the confinement of a small house, one attempts to

CHAPTER V: FAMILY LIFE

W. P. Suttles

1. Kinship Organization

342 [183] **The Household and the Family** Okinawan homes, both in the country and in the towns, show a surprising uniformity in structure, in floor plan, and even in orientation. This uniformity reflects the stability of society and at the same time reenforces it. The home of the [361] Okinawan farmer usually faces south; indeed the older villages as a whole were established on southward-facing slopes.

The house consists of two main rooms separated by sliding doors, a long and narrow back room behind the two front rooms, and a kitchen to one side, usually the west. The measurements are usually in multiples of three feet (the Japanese foot being almost identical with the English foot); the two main rooms are usually the same size, 9 by 9 or 12 by 12 feet, and the others are somewhat smaller. The roofs of most houses are thatched with "kaya", but people who can afford it have wholly or partly tiled roofs. The roof of the kitchen may have a separate peak and ridgepole from that of the main part of the house. Usually the roof of the main part of the house extends beyond the front rooms so that there is a narrow veranda across the front and halfway around the side opposite the kitchen. The house usually has no windows. The kitchen has an outside door and the front rooms have sliding doors all the way around under the veranda; these are usually open except at night or during bad weather.

The main part of the house has a floor of boards but the kitchen often has only an earth floor or else consists of two sections, one floored and one not. The kitchen is thus usually lower than the main part of the house and is referred to as "below" while the main part is "above", but this also implies a difference in status. The room farthest from the kitchen is called the "first room" and the middle room is the "second room". The back room may be 353 a single long room or may be divided into two. At the back of the kitchen is [354] the oven, usually made of earth or bricks with two or three holes for pots and pans to fit into. At the back of the second room, if the house is a "main house"---that of an eldest son, is the tootoomee (J. 'butsudan'), a cabinet for the ancestral tablets. At the back of the first room there is often an alcove containing a scroll and perhaps a family treasure; this is the u-tuku (J. 'tokonoma').

In the homes of more prosperous families the floors of the front rooms are permanently covered with "tatami", the thick mats used by the Japanese, but in most homes the only mats are the thinner mushiru, which are spread out e 352 only when needed. Furniture is simple; the mushiru are the equivalent of chairs [354] and beds; a low table may be brought out to put food upon at meal-time and a pot of burning charcoal may be brought out in cold weather for a little heat. Usually one sees only a basket of teacups and a tobacco-box. On formal occa- 592 sions the men sit in the first room and the women in the second, but usually 562 the partition is removed and the family simply lives in the whole space.

called saki in Okinawan, 'awamori' in Japanese. This drink is sold in several 273
grades and so is Japanese 'sake', but most farmers seem to prefer a rawer, stronger grade of 'awamori'.[1] In most homes 'awamori' is soon offered male [574]
guests if they call in the evening, sometimes in the afternoon as well. For [562]
festive occasions it is absolutely necessary. Many older men also drink it a bit every evening in small groups or even alone. Older women may drink a little, younger women, unless of the professional class, rarely.

When men drink together they invariably exchange drinks as a gesture of friendship. Generally the friendliness increases with each gesture, stimulating further gestures. Drunkenness is frequent. Different types of behavior among drunks are recognized and labelled appropriately. The 'uma-zake' ("horse-drunk") prances around; the 'buta-zake' ("pig drunk") sleeps; the 'ushi-zake' ("ox drunk") acts belligerent; the 'naki-zake' ("cry drunk") weeps. (These are Japanese terms, incidentally; I did not get native equivalents but assume they exist). But Okinawans who get drunk are mainly just plain friendly drunks; the belligerent drunk is very rare. Burd's description of Miyakoan drunken behavior---the sentimentality and endless expression of gratitude for friendship---would apply equally to the behavior of drunk Okinawans. And as Burd suggests, the reason may lie in the formality and etiquette that governs the relations of the sober; getting drunk is a means of relaxing the usual barriers.[2] The remarkable tolerance Okinawans show to drunks may arise from sympathy in the face of a common need. Drinking is often accompanied by singing and dancing. Men dance individually. Men who behave on most occasions with reserve and formality, may, after drinking a bit, dance with a grace and reckless ease that must be seen to be believed.

Okinawans do not drink water as frequently as Americans and even 271
with the more frequent tea and bottled drinks their total fluid consumption 272
would appear to be considerably less.

Rest and Sleep Chairs and beds are not usually found in Okinawan homes. 352
Mats serve the function of both. On formal occasions 516
Okinawans kneel. This they may do at the beginning of a formal gathering, but soon they are told to be at ease, which means sitting cross-legged for the men and with the feet to one side for the women. When relaxing at home they may put their feet out in front of them.

Okinawans sleep on the floor, usually on a quilt ('futon') on the 513
mat and with another put on over them. Often the whole family will sleep between two large quilts and under one large mosquito net suspended from the ceiling. To Americans unused to the floor it seems unbearably hard and the quilt above oppressive; it seems as though the Okinawans want too little below the body and too much above. From infancy on they sleep stretched out supine with a pillow under the head or neck. The pillow may be of cloth stuffed with husks or merely a block of wood.

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1 This observation is supported by the statement of a distiller interviewed by Lebra.

2 Burd 1952, p. 82.